

To: Federal Communications Commission,
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554
Re: Docket 04-233

Commission Members,

As a small-market single-station owner, broadcaster and member of the MAB, I'd like to address the issues brought to MAB members in a recent "MAB Legislative and Legal Monitor. " My comments are representative of the owners of WION-AM, a stand-alone AM radio station in Ionia, Michigan.

I can tell you, as an active owner and operator of our small station that any more regulations, requirements of community meetings and rules about voice tracking will be the catalyst for the death of small town stations, where small staffs and time constraints already make existing reporting and managing of required information (Logs, Quarterly Issues reports, public file maintenance) a difficult task. Stations like ours make time for the required paperwork and filing in-between daily operations, being on the air, handling weather emergencies, and maintaining our facilities. We're proud of our having passed the Michigan Association of Broadcasters' Alternative Broadcast Inspection Program. Many small town stations' staff members like ours also answer phones, and double-up on jobs like traffic, billing, commercial production, and more. If for no other reason that just not having the time for what I would term "legislated common sense" imposed on us, the ideas recently presented for discussion at the Federal level will have a detrimental effect on stations staffed in small towns. Ironical, isn't it that the very regulations proposed by the FCC in MD Docket number 04-233 will harm the community-conscious broadcaster the most? (Contrasting small market stations like WION with larger multi-ownership concerns who can simply hire someone to address the proposed issues!)

My partners and I bought WION-AM, a stand-alone AM station, and the only commercially licensed station in Ionia County, Michigan with the intent of providing a "full service" format, much like radio of the 1970's and 1980's. We provide locally programmed Music. (Not satellite) Network News and Sports at the top of every hour, live morning show and locally produced afternoon voice-tracked show. Yes, we are automated when we're not at the microphone, but...our voice tracking is done well, because information is sent to our talent so they can sound credible, local, and informed. At WION, we always break in to voice-tracked shows for weather and emergencies, even interacting with the voice tracking by proper planning and preparation of "emergency tracks." Our station is on the air 24 hours **because** of computers and voice-tracking, but no sacrifice is made in localism, NONE. Our voice tracking of the afternoon show is done by a 25-plus year radio veteran, who understands how to sound "local" and who makes appearances for remotes and our yearly anniversary celebrations of WION as "I-1430."

As quoted in the "Broadcast Law Blog"¹ regarding music reporting and lists:

¹ Davis Wright Tremaine LLP internet document of January 24, 2007, quoted by the Michigan Association of Broadcasters, which informed us of this topic's official discussion.

"The Commission indicates that it did not think that a ban on national playlists was required, it did ask whether broadcasters should be required to report the songs that they play, and how they choose their music. With that information, the Commission asks if it should consider the amount of local music played when assessing whether a station has served the needs of its community at license renewal time.".....

I would offer this with regard to additional reporting and the role of music in license renewal:

The reason WION's popularity (even with its handicap as small-town AM stand alone radio) has grown can be attributed to our own chosen programming, much of which is music. WION maintains a growing listening business list of local places we mention regularly on the air (whether they advertise or not) as a way of thanking these businesses for listening to local radio. There are many choices for radio listening in our county, most from the larger markets of Grand Rapids or Lansing. Businesses voluntarily report to us via phone, fax, or e-mail that they listen, because we play what we designed ourselves as the best programming we could possibly provide for our town. Programming is not brain surgery. We chose to do what no major market station does with regard to our music: we use 3 libraries, (Adult Contemporary, Classic Rock, and Oldies...plus specialty items we have added to our library ourselves.) Our music Director is an owner of our station, and learned radio back in the "full service" era. He programs a mix of the major genres fine-tuned to the different parts of the day, knowing we have office, school, home, and business listeners. Our active listening business list of over 70 offices, stores, and services speaks volumes about what we're doing...but it comes from hard work, and making our own music decisions....not from being loaded down with regulations and reporting requirements. Mainly, its common sense programming.

So, on the topic of "Local Music?" If one were to ask what the government and FCC's role in music selection should be? Our answer would be simple: "None!" The thought of adding more reporting requirements on music to the Government? Again, this would be just added paperwork to small-market operators. Larger companies can delegate someone to do the paper-pushing reports to the Government, but WION and stations like us are small operations, with actively working Owners and Managers. We don't need more paperwork and intervention. We need less so we can concentrate on what we are charged to create when we are granted our licenses....good, local programming on stations operating in the public interest.

Continuing on the thought expressed in the last sentence above...we also don't need town hall meetings to tell good programmers what to do. Quoting again, the "Broadcast Law Blog:"

"The Commission tentatively concludes that all stations will be required to establish a community advisory board to advise the station on the issues of importance to the community that can be addressed in the station's programming."

Instead, our industry needs to have dedicated owners who make decisions on a local level. That's us. That's WION-AM. Good local programming comes from local owners, operators, managers, and announcers, who all interact on a daily basis with their communities--on the phone, on the street, and in business. It's a naturally-occurring phenomenon when good talent is given free reign to communicate within the community.

Our little AM station sounds great. You're greeted at our studio door by a book of compliments, thank-you notes and e-mails praising our work in the community and our programming. We don't make the amount of money here in this small town that the bigger stations do....but, we made a commitment to Ionia County. We've been successful thus far, and are now looking at expanding to add a few carefully selected small stations to our ownership. The ones we have been approached to purchase are utilizing nearly 100 percent satellite-delivered programming. No localism beyond sports, weather, and EAS. WION's brand of localism is good utilization of talent and resources, is well done, and embraced by our community. We'd like to do the same for the (hopefully soon) new acquisitions to our company. It sounds, however that if the FCC and Government get their way, soon after we make a financial commitment of ownership to grow our radio business, our type of programming would be regulated or banned, and we'd be forced to shut down due to the red-tape and time constraints imposed by your proposed new reporting and programming requirements, (such as the proposed mandatory town meetings, and restrictions on the ability to utilize properly produced voice-tracking. Reference again, the Broadcast Law Blog): **"The Commission asks if "voice-tracking," (i.e. a radio announcer who provides announcing on a radio station from outside a local market, sometimes including local inserts to make it sound as if the announcer is local) should be limited or prohibited, or if disclosure should be required."**

Without voice-tracking, WION would no longer exist as a local station. Voice-tracking when properly produced is a cost-effective way to bring localism to radio. Whether the listener knows it is voice tracking or not is unimportant. The public does not question satellite-delivered programming as "local". Yet, they listen daily to satellite-delivered morning shows and don't question it when the only localism is "X" amount of minutes per hour for commercials, news, and weather. Or school delays. Why should local stations have rules on voice-tracking imposed, when many, like WION include interviews of local interest, phone calls, and local e-mails in regular programming? No satellite delivered service is talking about local Community Theatre. Or, the school's bowling team's highlights. Or, taking time to thank a new local client on the air for becoming an advertiser on local radio. My point is that voice-tracking is not the enemy. It does not need to be regulated. It does not need to be disclosed to the listener. It needs to be utilized in better ways by responsible owners, and the FCC and government cannot legislate nor enforce an individual owner's feeling of responsibility to their community.

As an owner, I often work long 12 to 18 hour days in my station. It's my chosen vocation. It's my chosen town, not just a license in some town that makes us look better to stockholders. It's personally rewarding to go to downtown Ionia and hear people comment on our station, its programming and its uniqueness. But, like all small market radio owners, WION is already burdened by rules, regulations, and general business paperwork which is required to keep this AM station growing and going. Just the required and justifiable engineering reports, maintenance, logs, weekly EAS, and public

issues reports are enough to keep a small station owner/operator busy when combined with regular daily duties. I, like some others get up at 3 in the morning to handle weather emergencies because I believe the EAS system is not enough. A recent web-poll on our WION website indicated that a large percentage of our listeners still tune to WION-AM for weather emergencies over television, the internet, and even free emergency weather telephone notification services.

As an active Owner/Operator, I assist with engineering. I host the morning show. WION had an automatic generator installed so we're always on-air no matter what. We've been granted a CP to expand our daytime signal, which issues that WION-AM has had for about 50 years. We ARE giving back to our community!

It also does not take having studios in the "city of license" to properly serve a community. The visibility of studios means nothing in an audio-based industry. Our studios are a mile north of our City, and those who want to visit make their way to us. They would do the same no matter the (legally operated) distance. When WION maintained a studio in downtown Ionia under previous owners, they saw NO increase in public traffic or input regarding station programming and operation. Operation of a federally-licensed station in the interest of the town to which the station is licensed is, once again, up to responsible owners and operators, and has nothing to do with where the studios are located. Should we be successful in our upcoming 2-station growth, we'll be operating two stations from one studio as they exist now. Small-market operators like we are cannot afford to pay duplicate utility and staffing costs, and to impose this rule would affect not only our future operations, but many that are like ours, and quite possibly force us to shut-down or sell our properties. In essence, our want to grow our business, maintain employment and bring improved programming could, if over-regulated end up in bankruptcy when we cannot meet new location-of-studios requirements.

As this owner/operator sees it, what is being recommended by those who, for the most part don't work in radio on a daily basis implies that in general, broadcasters are neither responsible nor accountable to our communities. Well, WION-AM's team is responsible and I strongly urge other broadcasters, Broadcasters' associations, and the FCC, most of all to resist un-needed additional regulation and reporting requirements, else there will be many small communities left without a voice at all, when manpower and budget requirements begin to outweigh available time and funds to hire personnel to answer to Federal red tape.

Respectfully,

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